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Check on C.I.A. Looks Logical

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There has been mounting apprehension of late about the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in South Viet Nam and elsewhere. Congress has taken some notice and there may well develop a debate on the matter. Sen. Wayne Morse of Oregon has demanded Congressional checks on what he described as creeping police state powers.

Actually, Sen. Ernest Gruening of Alaska set off the discussion by announcing that he was proposing the setting up of a watch dog group on C-I-A operations. Morse took on from there by saying that he, too, has been disturbed for a long time about the unchecked power of the C-I-A.

Morse contended that it is not safe in a democracy to have any agency clothed with vast powers over which Congress has no control. It is known that the C-I-A long has resisted congressional efforts to look into its operations.

Gruening had pointed out earlier that the agency is described as a finder of facts, rather than a maker of policy, but he expressed

doubt about this. He said the intelligence agency has been notably unsuccessful as a fact finder, and he mentioned Cuba in this context.

It may be submitted in this general respect that many of the charges that have been made against the C-I-A apply to other organizations of this type. What needs to be explained is that an organization working under the cloak of secrecy can neither explain nor strike back. There may have been reasons why the C-I-A did not do so well in Cuba. There may be reasons why its work in South Viet Nam is not satisfactory.

At the same time, though, no agency of this type can perform independently. It must be responsible to a department of the government. Otherwise there would be a negation of our system of checks and balances and there would have to be a fourth and totally independent branch of the government, which just is not permissible.

It can do no harm for Congress to look into the situation. That is part of its function anyway. There may well be need of reassurances.